

**Remarks Given by
Lt. Governor Becky Skillman
Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs Rural Summit
November 15th, 2007, Indianapolis, IN**

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, David, for those kind words, and thanks for your leadership. It's great to be here with our friends from around the state, our partners in progress

I know you saw my partner, Mitch, yesterday, and he gave you a good picture of our state's overall economic health. It's a picture that looks brighter for ALL Hoosiers. I'm proud of the progress we've been making, and I thank you for the part you've played in that.

Anyone who knows me, knows I have a passion for our smaller cities and towns. I love and appreciate our urban areas – in fact, I live in one now – but Bedford has always been my home, and small town Indiana will always be near to my heart. When we go to the table with an economic development question, rural Indiana is always at the top of my list.

The Governor and I are determined to see the entire state thrive. I'm proud that rural counties have not been left out of the progress that's being made in our state. Far from widening the gap that has existed for so long between rural and urban Indiana, we have made a concerted effort to encourage growth in every region.

We're doing our part in state government to achieve an economic comeback, but we would be far less successful if local leaders like you weren't on board and working hard.

We don't operate under any illusions that state government can swoop in and make everything perfect. We know that government can't create prosperity. But, it can create an environment where YOU can create prosperity.

And we believe that prosperity is possible anywhere. Our small cities and towns boast some of the richest resources and some of the most interesting parts of our heritage – not to mention almost half of our population. And we have never been so well equipped to develop those areas and strengthen their assets.

We cannot become a state of haves and have nots. Our Office of Community and Rural Affairs has a lot of resources that are focused on local assets and sustainable growth. We're always working to open doors for local economic development professionals and community leaders. You are all here today because you want to take advantage of the tools we have to offer to make a difference in your communities. I applaud you for your efforts.

And, I am pleased that the State has been a partner with you. We are constantly working with communities to help them realize their own visions for growth and opportunity. In 2006 alone, just five agencies under the Lt. Governor distributed almost \$300 million in grants to communities in support of their efforts. These dollars are having a tremendous impact. They are revitalizing downtowns and Main Streets, building affordable housing for seniors and boosting local economic development and workforce development efforts.

Beyond the work of those agencies, we are making significant gains around the state at bringing new jobs to Indiana. So far this year, the state's Economic Development Corporation has closed 115 competitive deals, bringing more 16,000 jobs and \$2.71 billion in investment to the state. And I'm proud to tell you that many of those jobs are coming to small towns and rural areas.

RURAL SUMMIT

At a time when rural Indiana is gaining momentum, we want to make sure we are staying connected. This summit was designed to get you connected with other community leaders and with the agencies that can help you realize your dreams for your home town. We wanted to provide leaders like you with an opportunity to learn and a forum to talk about ways to tackle your challenges.

When good people come together like this, good things come of it. I hope you will come away from the summit with a few new strategies ready to spark change and positive growth in your community.

No matter what challenges your community is facing – be that preparing for new business investments or bringing new technology to your area – I hope the Rural Summit has left you better equipped to go home and get started. We are thrilled to work with so many who Hoosiers who are excited about the future.

By working hand-in-hand, we are proving how much we can accomplish when public and private sectors come together. This summit has provided yet another opportunity for that partnership to grow stronger.

I am pleased that a number of prominent rural experts have joined us for this conference. We thank them for coming to share their opinions and ideas about the state of rural Indiana, transportation planning, agribusiness development wealth creation and retention, and entrepreneurship. Their input is invaluable. I'm sure their seminars have given you lots of ideas to take back to your communities for discussion and action.

RISE 2020

I know that you've been spending your time here digging into the RISE 2020 plan. It's great to have some of the key developers of that plan with us: Chuck Fluharty and Sam Cordes. It is inspiring to see a group of, people from all walks, all across the state, come together to find ways to turn these big ideas—these pillars—into actions that will benefit their communities.

We knew we were creating something great when so many of our partners from rural Indiana joined the conversations that led to RISE 2020. But, like any vision, its real value is in its results and accomplishments.

And the accomplishments have been significant. As a result of RISE 2020, OCRA has created new programs. The new Rural Capacity Grants, designed to foster entrepreneurship and workforce development. They have changed the grant process to encourage communities to leverage local philanthropic capital. And, we have used the ideas of RISE 2020 to develop new policy.

These are great results, but they are just the beginning. We can do so much more, and to do that, we are dedicating new resources to helping communities use RISE 2020 to promote their own development.

When we created OCRA, it was the first time that all of the state's rural-serving programs were brought together under one roof. Our goal was to make it easier for community leaders and organizations to access the resources of the state. And it was a success.

In the same way, we want to make it easy for all of you to get the help you need to move RISE 2020 from vision to action. So, we are giving you one single point of contact for all things related to the plan. Susie Bruce – who is about to have a couple million new best friends! – Susie will serve as the RISE 2020 Ombudsman, housed at OCRA.

Susie is already on staff at OCRA, so she is familiar with the challenges rural Indiana faces and the opportunities that are out there as well. She has more than 20 years of experience in consulting, project management, budgeting and staff management. Susie will be an invaluable resource for communities as they work to achieve their own economic development visions.

Our commitment to rural development remains as strong as ever. I hope you will take advantage of this new resource to help your communities use RISE 2020 to accomplish their own goals. Nothing thrills me more than to visit Indiana's cities and towns and see how they are putting creative thinking and new ideas into action.

CFF/RCG

That action translates into measurable progress all across the state. There's a growing sense that our years of economic stagnation are being replaced with a season of rejuvenation.

Just yesterday, I awarded 30 Community Focus Fund grants totaling more than \$13 million dollars. These dollars are a significant investment in local economic development. Since 2005, OCRA has awarded 161 Community Focus Funds and 107 Planning Grants totaling more than \$72 million. We know these dollars are being put to good use on projects such as community buildings, senior centers, libraries, youth centers and historic preservation.

We awarded the first Rural Capacity Grants in 2006, which grew out of the RISE 2020 priorities. And to date, \$4.4 million has gone to 33 community partnerships. And we're already seeing the positive results.

REALITY SPANISH

One example of what state dollars are doing can be found in the Reality Spanish Program of Northeast Indiana. Reality Spanish is administered by the Health Care Foundation of Kosciusko County, Inc. in partnership with the Kosciusko County Community Foundation, and they received an RCG in December 2006. They are using the funds to expand the Reality Spanish and Reality English programs in that region.

The Spanish program helps English speakers learn basic Spanish terms in their field of employment – including many public service fields, like health and law enforcement. During 2007, 65 Hoosiers were trained.

Participants saw their ability to communicate with Spanish-speaking people on the job rise, and they became more confident in their language abilities. The skills they learned through Reality Spanish help them do their jobs better, benefiting not just themselves, but their communities as well.

PHILANTHROPIC CAPITAL

The Reality Spanish program is a success story for another reason. Not only are they helping move their community forward, they're doing it with the help of local community foundation dollars.

The whole idea of using philanthropic capital is an emerging national discussion. Especially in rural areas, it's an under-used resource, and we hope to change that by encouraging communities to use those dollars to match grant funds.

Community foundations, in particular, are a significant resource. In Indiana alone, a recent study by the Indiana Grantmakers Alliance estimated that \$3.3 billion in local wealth could be captured through community foundations in the next ten years.

State and federal funding isn't going to be able to keep up with the needs of every community. We need community foundations to be operating at their peak, and in partnership with local leaders. They show great promise to become critical strategic investors in Indiana and beyond.

CONCLUSION

I'm encouraged to see so many people here today who are willing to do the work required to keep Indiana moving forward. Rural Indiana possesses a unique and wonderful blend of opportunities and challenges.

But I see before me some of the people who want to overcome our challenges, capitalize on our opportunities and who see just how bright our future can be. I've said many times before that rural development happens by choice and not by chance. I am glad that you made the choice to join us this week and the choice to be a part of that development.

When you take on the work of progress, you're doing something that not just any one can do. Your ventures – sometime adventures – make all of Indiana prosper! So thank you for taking on that role. Business growth, economic development and community development is ultimately in your hands. You are the people who care about the future of our communities and the future of our state. And you are the real reason our state will see a complete economic comeback.

Thanks for all you do – Thanks for having me here today.